

March 6, 2013

To: House Judiciary Committee
From: Janet Duffy, Executive Director, YWCA Mercy Home of Great Falls
Re: SB 306 sponsored by Senator Olson – Revise Partner Family Member Assault Laws

Good morning. The YWCA Mercy Home of Great Falls appreciates the opportunity to be able to submit written testimony in support of SB 306. My name is Janet Duffy and I am the Executive Director of the YWCA of Great Falls. The YWCA of Great Falls has operated the Mercy Home – a temporary shelter for abused women and children for the last 36 years. We provide many other services in addition to safe shelter to victims of domestic and sexual violence. We strongly support Senate Bill 306 sponsored by Senator Olson.

SB 306 would amend the existing PFMA statute to remove the language “persons of the opposite sex”. This change is vitally important.

- We cannot allow abusers to use this ‘loop hole’ as a way to escape prosecution.
- The way the current law is written it has been ruled unconstitutional and must be changed in order to maintain the integrity of the existing law.
- Offenders must be held accountable whether in same sex or opposite sex relationships to decrease violence in our community.

On February 14, 2013, we held a candle light vigil and memorial dedication at the YWCA calling for an end to violence against women and children. We continue to see cases of intimate partner assault, sexual assault and child abuse **increase** in our region. These statistics are more than numbers to us at the YWCA and Mercy Home; they are faces of our mothers, sisters, daughters and friends. If we encourage our community to be accountable to end violence when they hear it, see it, or learn of it and then the offender is freed because language in a law can be argued as discrimination, what message are we sending?

Our mission at the YWCA is to “empower women and eliminate racism,” and as a Charter Member of the NAACP we are the first organization to identify and stand against discrimination. Prosecuting a heterosexual abuser for brutally assaulting their partner is not discrimination, it is justice.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important issue. I strongly urge you to vote **YES on SB 306** and move it to the House floor for consideration. If you have questions, I am available to provide further information.

Sincerely,
Janet Duffy

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